

Stouffville Tribune

SPORTS

Poetry in motion

Northern Ontario centreman a hit with Spirit of Stouffville

BY BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

With a five-foot five-inch, 185-pound frame that could be described as less than classically athletic, Michel Bond looks more like a candidate for a beer league than a Junior A hockey team.

But when the likable 18-year-old centreman with the Spirit of Stouffville takes to the ice, it's sheer poetry. The resident of Hearst, Ont. is fast emerging as a slick playmaker with a magic scoring touch with the Spirit.

He leads the team in total points with 12 goals and 17 assists after 22 games and is a key reason why his club is in the thick of the chase for third place in the eight team North Conference.

Bond shows a combination of polished talent, poise and toughness on the ice. His good-natured chatter and comical ways have made him a favourite in the dressing room.

"Michel is a great playmaker with deceiving speed and quick hands," praised Spirit head coach Brian Perrin. "And he's smart."

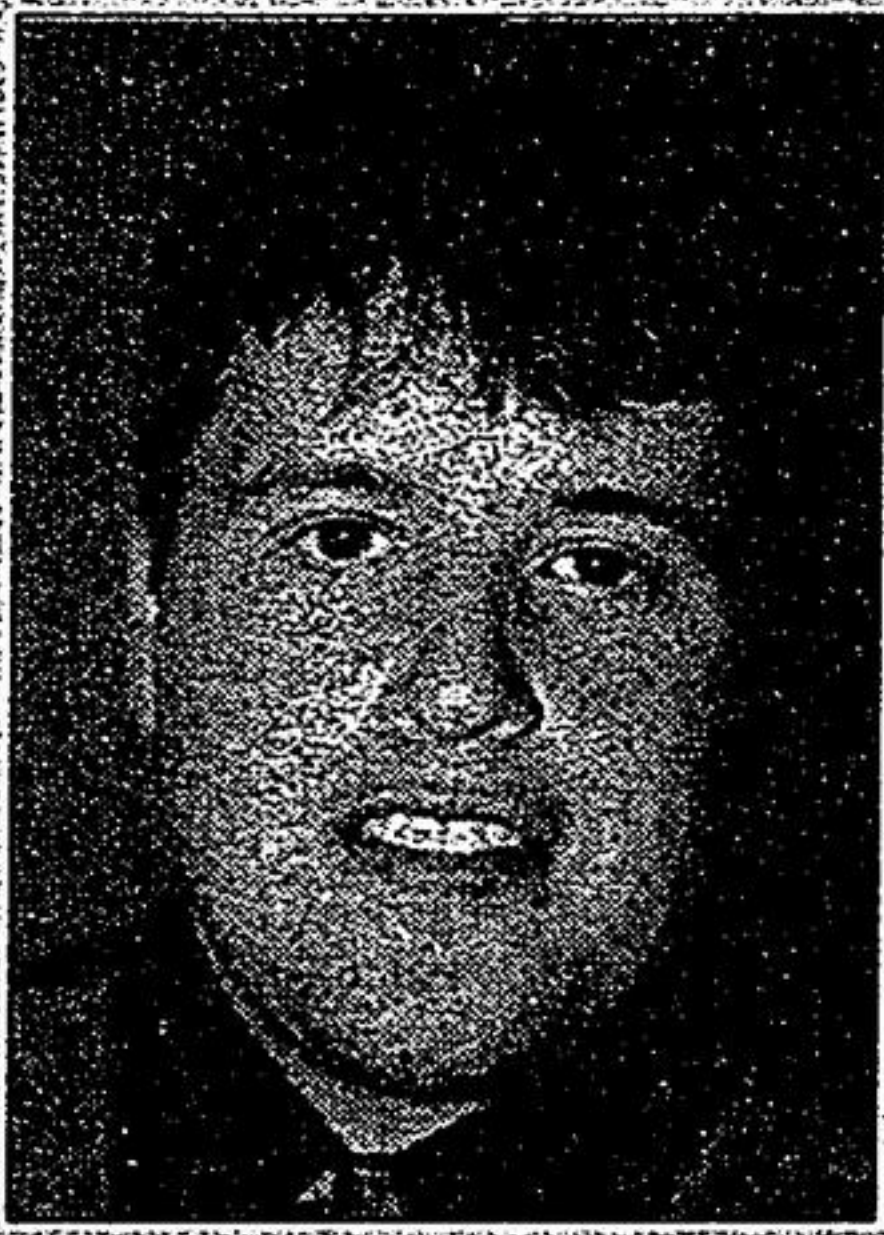
Perrin said he's not surprised with the way Bond has come on in recent weeks. "He was the leading scorer in his league last season. He's really gaining momentum here."

Perrin said Bond has also had a positive influence on his Spirit teammates.

"He's the kind of player who can raise the level of the players around him."

Bond is simply delivering what he said he would. "Michel told us he would do well," said Spirit general manager Dieter Schmidt. "He was quite vocal about the fact that we made a good choice when we signed him, that he would leave an impression on the coaches and his team mates."

Bond's 39 goals and 88 points in 39 games last season was a North Superior Junior B



MICHEL BOND: Junior hockey player from Hearst, Ont. is making friends in Stouffville.

Hockey League record. He was instrumental in leading his Hearst Elans to the league title the past two seasons. The Elans took the consolation title at the 1997-'98 Keystone Cup, which includes the best Junior B teams from Northern Ontario and Western Canada.

With those credentials, Bond feels his pre-season claims were justified. "I'm happy it's going well. I'm coming off a league-leading points season last year. It's taken a lot of hard work but it's working out well for me this season."

Bond admits it took a while to adjust to the provincial league and his new teammates. "It's a quicker league than I've played in," said Bond. "There was lots of line juggling at first and that made it difficult for me."

Bond started to find the range when he was linked up with wingers Sean Scully and Chris Large. The chemistry was right, as the trio has become the team's top scoring line.

"We're passing the puck well and we're talking out there," said Bond. "I'm starting to have fun now that the team is gelling together."

Bond, whose first language is French, says it took a little while to adjust to playing away from his home town. "It

was a little tough at first. Everything is in English, and I didn't know anybody when I came here."

But that's all changed. Bond's amiable nature has made him a favourite with his teammates. He is enrolled in his OAC year at Stouffville District Secondary School, and is billeted with Stouffville residents Dan and Flo McEachen. "I know everybody now."

Dan McEachen, whose wife is French Canadian, says Bond has been of assistance to the couple's three young children, who attend a French immersion school.

"Michel helps the kids with their French lessons, and they help him with his English," said McEachen. "Michel likes Stouffville and he is well-liked by everyone who meets him. He's a real gentleman."

Bond knows when to leave the Mr. Nice Guy image behind.

Schmidt says Bond knows when it's time to leave the Mr. Nice Guy image behind. "He's fun to be around. He jokes and laughs a lot and he's having a good time. But he's serious about his hockey. He takes charge out on the ice."

Bond said he's tried to convince some of his former teammates from Hearst to join him with the Spirit. But none have his sense of adventure. "They don't want to leave," said Bond, suggesting the snowmobiling is too good back home for his friends to pack up and head south.

Bond thinks the Spirit are going to continue to be a contender this season. "Everyone's focussed, and that's good."

Looking ahead to next season, he just wants to continue to get the opportunity to play at the highest level possible.

Volleyball dream alive in 2000 for SDSS

The dream of regaining former glory has been put off until the 21st century for the Stouffville District Secondary School Spartans senior boys volleyball team.

The SDSS squad was stymied in its attempts to advance at both the regional and provincial levels in a pair of closely contested playoff matches held over the past two weeks.

The Spartans were defeated two games to one by Markham's Markville Secondary School in a York Region Athletic Association quarterfinal played in a cramped gymnasium at St. Robert's Catholic High School in Thornhill Nov. 8. The Spartans were edged 14-16 in the deciding game of the best of three set.

The following Monday saw the SDSS team drop another tough three game set against long time rival Sutton District High School in a showdown of the two York AA level schools.

The win sent Sutton off to play the Durham Region titlists, Courice Secondary School, for the right to take part in this year's Ontario Federation of Schools Athletic Association AA championships for schools with 1,000 students or less.

For the Spartans, the loss to Markville spoiled their long shot hopes of chasing after the first true all-York Region championship ever to be staged.

In past years when SDSS was the dominant AA team in York Region the larger AAA teams held their own playoffs.

"We played tough," acknowledged SDSS coach Jim Fletcher. "We were still alive at the end."

While refusing to use it as an excuse, Fletcher said a low overhang at one end of the St. Robert's gym hampered his team's serving in the first and third games as the teams alternated ends for each game.

Against Sutton, Fletcher said his players had trouble contending with the height of the opposition.

"You can't play a tipping game against players that size."

He said the Spartans might still have won had they been a little more aggressive.

Fletcher took solace in the fact that the one win his team managed against Sutton was the first of the season as the two teams earlier squared off in a series of exhibition and tournament games.

Fletcher, who coached the Spartan York AA dynasty teams of the mid-1980's through early 1990's, said he would have liked to see his team qualify for the OFSAA championships for the first time since 1993.

"Sure I would like to have won and gone to OFSAA. That would have been nice for



Bruce Stapley

the players. But it wasn't our day."

But he said his young team had a successful season despite falling short in the playoffs. The team managed a second place finish in the YRAA southeast division, along with a silver and a bronze medal in tournament play.

"We were in every game we played this season. For a team this young that's fantastic."

He praised the commitment of his players. "They're a tremendous group of individuals. It's not the winning. It's the camaraderie and improving together as a team that counts."

Fletcher said it is unrealistic to expect the Spartans to regain their dominance so soon after the interruptions to the athletic program at SDSS over the past few years.

"It takes time to get it started up again," he said.

"We were going up against teams this season with players who play on club teams as well as their school teams."

Fletcher feels his team can only get stronger next year as he sets out to restore the school's traditional reputation as a volleyball powerhouse.

With five returning players from this year's team, including the team's impressive Grade 10 student Kevin McGrath, Fletcher predicts a return to past glory.

"We can build a franchise around Kevin McGrath."

Also returning to the Spartans again next fall will be power hitters Shane Timms, Mike Allen and Rob Jones, and middle player Steve Cox. Joining them from the junior level will be a host of promising players including Ben Bellissimo, Jon Ferguson, Cameron Davis, Derek Conga and Jason Davis.

"We'll have some size next year for a change," noted Fletcher.

Fletcher feels a strong roster, along with his many years of experience as a coach, should be enough to put SDSS back on top again as soon as next fall.

"We're going to try. I know how to do it."

DEADLINE Monday, prior to publication. **DATES** November 25th

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